



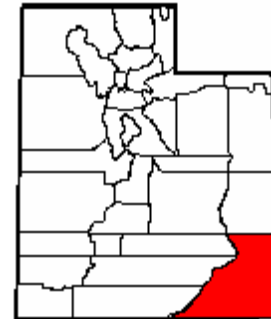
Size and Scope of San Juan County Agriculture 2020

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Introduction

Located in the southeast corner of the state with approximately 5.2 million acres, San Juan County (SJC) is the largest county in Utah. It makes up one of the four corner states bordered by Colorado on the east and Arizona on the south. Surrounding Utah counties include Kane, Garfield, Wayne, Emery, and Grand. The current population is estimated at 15,772.

Land Ownership

The land ownership within the county is divided as shown in Figure 1.

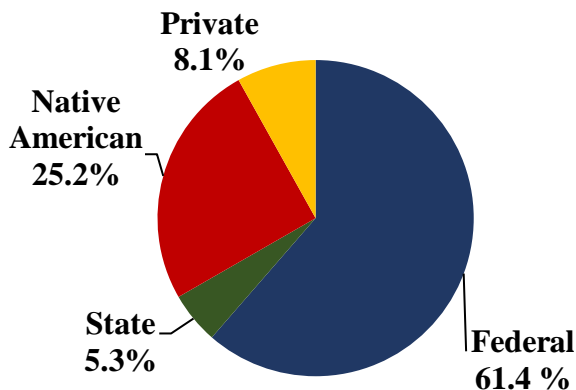


Figure 1.
San Juan County Land Ownership

Source: 2017 Utah Counties Fact Book

A majority of the county's federal lands are maintained by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS; 9%) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM; 41%). The remaining 10% are maintained by the National Park Service or used as recreation areas. SJC state land is primarily under the jurisdiction of the Utah School and Institutional Trust Land Administration (SITLA). Portions of the state-owned land are Utah state parks and recreational areas. Private lands are primarily farming and grazing areas. The Native American trust lands are divided between the Navajo Reservation and the White Mesa Ute Reservation (23%). The Navajo Reservation encompasses the most southern portion of SJC. In comparison, the White Mesa Ute Reservation is in the east central part of the county.

The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported 1,657,212 acres in farms or ranches and a 10% increase in the number of farms in SJC (746 to 823). Farmstead average size was 2,014 acres with an average value of \$367 per acre. The county had 130,173 acres in cropland, where 44,614 acres were harvested and 7,571 were irrigated. The remaining 2/3 of cropland was fallow.

County Characteristics

The growing season in SJC averages five months. Climate history for SJC includes 2019 annual precipitation and average growing period data as reported from the Utah Climate Center (Table 1). Elevation for agriculture-producing areas ranges from 4,400 to 7,500 feet.

There are many soil types throughout SJC similar to those found throughout the Colorado Plateau. Soil types commonly consist of silt to sandy loam in most agriculture-producing areas, with some having clay soils all ranging from 7.5–9.0 pH (O’Geen, 2013). Soils tend to be well drained to excessively drained. Heavy gravel and sandstone are also found in the region. Water is alkaline with similar pH to neighboring soils.

Table 1. <i>San Juan County Growing Characteristics</i>				
Location	Annual precip.	Last spring freeze	First fall freeze	Growing period
La Sal 1SW	13.19 in.	May 26	Sept. 27	124 days
Mexican Hat	6.31 in.	Apr. 19	Oct. 23	189 days
Bluff	7.76 in.	Apr. 25	Oct. 11	168 days
Blanding	13.07 In.	May 12	Oct. 12	153 days
Monticello #2	20.69 in.	May 21	Oct. 05	138 days
Navajo MTN	-	May 18	Oct 05	137 days

Source: Utah Climate Center

Crop Production

Current SJC crop production includes hay, wheat, and safflower (National Agricultural Statistics Service [NASS], 2019). Crop and hay sales totaled \$2,069,000 for 2017. The 2017 yields and total acres for each crop harvested are displayed in Table

2. Wheat is produced in a majority of SJC’s farmed acreage, followed by hay and safflower. Ground preparation primarily consists of intensive tillage (51,450 acres). Intensive tillage practices consist of disking the soil multiple times during the fall and spring prior to planting. No-till practices increased to 7,296 acres in 2017 from 4,795 acres in 2012.

Table 2. <i>San Juan County 2017 Crop Acres and Yields</i>			
Crop	Harvested acres	Yield	Average yield/acre
Wheat	34,692	771,856 bu.	22.2 bu.
Hay/Alfalfa	6,939	23,862 tons	3.4 tons
Safflower	2,462	1,520,740 lbs.	617.7 lbs.

Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

An estimated 98% of wheat is planted in the fall (San Juan County, 2018). Crop rotations include: (1) wheat one year, then fallow one year; (2) wheat on year one, safflower on year two, then fallow on year three; or (3) wheat, fallow, then alfalfa for several years then repeat. Typical ground preparation for planting alfalfa includes spraying Roundup® in the fall or early spring to kill the cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) prior to disking. The ground is then harrowed and planted.

Approximately 75% of the alfalfa produced is irrigated, ranging from two to three cuttings of alfalfa each year, and four on occasion in warmer areas with irrigation. Dryland-grown alfalfa generally produces one cutting per year (two cuttings on a good year). Growers purchase about 25% of all inputs (e.g., seed, fertilizer, pesticides, etc.) locally, while buying the remaining 75% in a neighboring county or state.

Vegetable Production

Vegetable production in SJC increased from 47 farms in 2012 to 181 farms in 2017 (NASS, 2019).

Additionally, vegetable production acreage increased from 79 to 179 acres. Sales totaled to \$790,000 for all fresh vegetable products in 2017. A majority of vegetable products grown in SJC are winter and summer squash (41 farmed acres), and watermelon (120 farmed acres). Other vegetable crops include pumpkins, green onion, peppers, radishes, sweet corn, turnips, and fresh herbs. A local county market for vegetable producers does not currently exist. Producers go to neighboring counties and states to market their produce.

Livestock Production

Approximately 90% of all SJC farmland is utilized as pasture. Cattle and calf sales totaled \$6,209,000 and sheep and goat product sales totaled \$294,000 in 2017. Table 3 lists major classes of livestock inventories produced in the county as of 2017 compared with 2012 inventories.

SJC livestock producers grow most of their feed to supplement rangeland drought conditions. Current drought conditions continue to strain forage in rangelands and producer daily operations. Common SJC vegetation growing during drought conditions are more palatable to sheep and goat than to beef. This is a partial reason for sheep and goat inventories increasing by 50.5% and beef inventories decreasing 25.3% (Table 3).

Beef producer practices include calving in local pastures. After calving, herds are moved to summer rangelands in Colorado. Producers move the herds back to county pasture in the fall and calves are sold to out-of-state buyers.

Sheep and goat producer practices include lambing in pasture during the early spring. Rangeland grazing begins after calving. Herds are moved back to pasture early in the summer if drought conditions persist and receive supplemental feed. Market lambs and goats are sold to Blue Mountain Meats, Inc. or out of the county.

Table 3.
Livestock Inventories in San Juan County

Livestock	2012	2017	% Change
All cattle	14,312	14,591	1.9%
Beef cows	11,080	9,381	-15.3%
Sheep and lambs	5,493	8,269	50.5%

Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

Producer Farm Income

SJC has seen growth in farm income. Cash receipts from 2017 field crops totaled \$8,598,000 and cash receipts from livestock totaled \$8,177,000. Total 2017 cash receipts were up \$3,418,000 from 2012 cash receipts (\$13,358,000). There are 1,637 total producers in SJC: 1,163 Native American and 474 being white or more than one race. The average age of the primary farmer or rancher was 56.8 in 2017. The principal operator average age is graphed in Figure 2 for all USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture years since 1997.

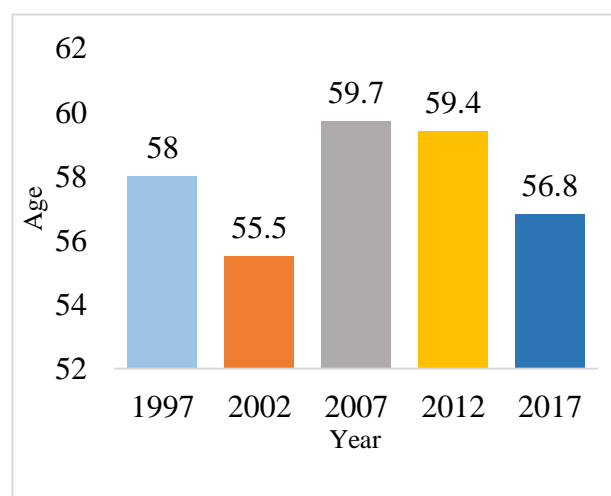


Figure 2.
Principal Operator Age in San Juan County

Source: 2017 USDA-NASS Census of Agriculture

Sources

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